



Aethiopica 2 (1999)

International Journal of Ethiopian and
Eritrean Studies

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Review

ALBERTO SBACCHI, *Legacy of Bitterness. Ethiopia and Fascist Italy, 1935–1941*

Aethiopica 2 (1999), 269–274

ISSN: 1430–1938

Published by

Universität Hamburg

Asien Afrika Institut, Abteilung Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

Hiob Ludolf Zentrum für Äthiopistik

Reviews

Es folgen das Literaturverzeichnis (S. 259-279) und ein nützliches Sachregister (S. 280-284), das sich Rez. gelegentlich noch etwas ausführlicher gewünscht hätte. So weist die Autorin z.B. unter *Mäṣṣafä Milad* zwar auf die Stellen in der Einleitung hin, an denen sie das *MM* als Quelle für den Andämta-Kommentar behandelt, nicht jedoch auf die Stellen der Übersetzung, die sie als auf dem *MM* basierend identifiziert hat, und die beispielsweise für den, der über die Rezeption des *MM* arbeitet, durchaus von Interesse sind (entsprechend auch bei anderen Quellenschriften). Auch Einträge zu Realien wie "Hostie" (zu S. 214), "Sandelholz" (zu S. 251) oder "Zebra" (zu S. 127) hätten vielleicht manche Benutzer begrüßt.⁵ Den Band beschließt eine photomechanische Reproduktion des der Übersetzung zugrundeliegenden Druckes, da der vor langer Zeit gedruckte amharische Text wohl nicht allgemein verfügbar ist. Das platzsparende Querformat ist etwas unpraktisch, da der Benutzer beim Vergleich das Buch ständig drehen muß.

Pedanten könnten sich an der mitunter inkonsistenten Transkription des Gəʿəz stören, z.B. *Hoḫetä bərhan* statt *Hoḫ(ə)tä* (S. 281) oder Lebna Dəngəl (S. 14) statt Ləbnä Dəngəl oder gleich Lebna Dengel usw. Lies auch Ibn at-Ṭaiyib (mit *tašdid*! S. 246, S. 257, S. 263, S. 281); die Schreibung As-Safi abu l-Fada'il ibn al'-Assal (S. 109, Fn. 117) wäre nicht notwendig gewesen!

Der Autorin ist für die große Mühe, die sie aufgewandt hat, zu danken. Sie hat in hervorragender Weise einen wichtigen Text dieser charakteristischen äthiopischen Literaturgattung der Forschung erschlossen.

Stefan Weninger

ALBERTO SBACCHI, *Legacy of Bitterness. Ethiopia and Fascist Italy, 1935–1941* = Lawrenceville, NJ — Asmara, The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1997. xxxix + 434 pp. 6 maps. ISBN 0-932415-74-1; Price \$ 19.95.

The history of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict of 1934–35 and of the subsequent Fascist occupation of Ethiopia (1936–41) has been a ceaseless subject of study among scholars and amateurs alike. Some are serious studies and have contributed to our knowledge while others presented known facts and interpretations in

⁴ Hier könnte man auch auf den Mörser und die Backform verweisen, die erwähnt werden, weil sie zum Backen des himmlischen Brotes nicht benötigt werden (S. 165).

⁵ Dabei ist sich Rez. aus eigener Erfahrung wohl bewußt, wie subjektiv die Arbeit des Registerherstellens ist!

their own formulation. To judge in which category the book under review falls is rather formidable on account of its nature. It is a compilation of a series of ten articles the author had published in various journals and conference proceedings during the years 1974–86, though they have allegedly been “... expanded and updated with the latest available literature” (p. xx). As such, the substance is but an old wine in a new bottle.

On the other hand, the compilation is quite handy and saves the reader from groping after numerous periodicals and conference proceedings which are not necessarily available in every library anyhow. As a matter of fact, this is the primary merit of the work as a book. It is in any case provided with the necessary facilities of access – a table of contents, an introduction, a list of sources and an index – accessories which should by no means be taken for granted. Otherwise, one can speak merely of ten good essays rather than about a book with ten chapters.

The author is apparently aware of this situation and attempts to create a relationship among his essays by reducing the essence of the “ten chapters” into four issues:

“a) The Italo-Ethiopian War and public opinion reaction of African-Americans, the Africans, and the Italian people; b) the cost of Empire, in terms of the loss of human life among both the Italian and Ethiopian peoples; c) the relations of Italians with various Ethiopian ethnic groups and the Ethiopian reaction to Italian rule; and d) the recognition of the Italian Empire by the great powers” (p. xx).

Here we may ask why it is necessary to bring these interesting but incoherent issues together in a book? Their common ground is naturally the Italian colonial aspiration, but there are many other aspects to this historical phenomenon untouched by the book. The issues listed are neither more important than others nor were they unknown to Ethiopian scholarship. It is also rather unusual, though quite handy for readers as stated above, to compile and reproduce one’s own articles. The author has, however, his own reason for doing so, though the reviewer’s enquiry with some Italian Éthiopiens could not confirm the author’s justification:

“Scholars agree that the topic of Italian colonization has not received enough attention and that Ethiopia under Italian rule has become a neglected topic of discussion. Yet to better understand contemporary events it is necessary to look at the Italian involvement in the Horn of Africa. This is then the main reason for publishing

these essays in book form: to continue the debate and to provide information on some neglected aspects of Fascist colonialism" (p. xv).

In so far as we cannot pursue further either the so-called "controversy" among Italian scholars or whether at all the book could eventually provide an impetus "to continue the debate", we should turn to scrutinizing the content and presentation of the work itself. Considered separately, each chapter is well written and reads fluently, esp. if the reader is unaware of the subtle stumbling blocks, examples of which I will mention later. Nonetheless, each essay retains its identity and does not easily unfold its affinity to its counterparts. The first two chapters, for instance, deal with the attitudes and reactions of Marcus Garvey and his followers and that of the Italian public to the Fascist invasion of Ethiopia respectively. Each of them is no doubt an interesting historical topic, but both of them lack their correlatives to make a reasonable background to an historical phenomenon of the magnitude chosen as a theme of study. The first, a valuable contribution by itself, could have made an excellent background to the history of the Italo-Ethiopian war if its scope were expanded to include international public opinions, for there were quite remarkable reactions in the various European, Asian and African societies against the Fascist march on Ethiopia.

It is indeed gratifying to read the views and reactions of the Italian people regarding the war their government waged in 1935, but an objective historiography would require a similar survey of the views and reactions of the Ethiopian and neighbouring peoples. In such a study, those who welcomed the invaders should be described and analysed as much as those who resisted them. In fact, the Ethiopian perspective is poorly represented in the book in general, and most of the conspicuous mistakes of the author occur in that area, as can be seen below.

Most of the historical points are documented by archival and published sources. As an experienced archivist, SBACCHI's use of archival materials and Ms. collections is no doubt genuine and meticulous. His list of sources indicates that he pruned the major archives and libraries in Italy, Belgium, France, Great Britain, the United States and Ethiopia. It should, however, be noted that, according to his own admission, "This study is based primarily on unpublished Italian archival information" (p. xix). We may, therefore, assume the archives and libraries of other countries listed above were accessed for purposes of comparison or supplement.

Here again, there are some queer and inexplicable appearances. In spite of the fact that he did his research in Ethiopia, there is no hint that he used the rich collection of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies in Addis Ababa. He could as well make use of the reminiscences of Ethiopian elders particularly in connection

with the relations between the Italians and the various Ethiopian communities during the occupation period. After all, many Ethiopians who could well remember the Italian period were still alive in the 1970s and 80s when the research was conducted.

There are also quite a few mistakes of historical and semantic nature. Following the introduction which surveys the events leading to the Fascist invasion of Ethiopia, there is a chronology of events which the author probably thought are the most important. But it is difficult to comprehend why some dates are omitted although they have unmistakable relevance to the topics presented in the book. For instance, an Ethiopian diplomatic delegation which visited Washington in 1919 is mentioned whereas similar delegations which visited Italy, France and Great Britain in that particular year are ignored. That question may be thought to infringe into the right of choice of the author, if there is such a thing, and should not necessarily be pursued here. What cannot be ignored is, however, the fact that some of the statements made in this chronology and elsewhere in the book lack precision and thus can easily mislead the reader. Space does not allow a catalogue of all the questionable statements, and we must content ourselves with a few examples:

The entry "1907 The construction of the Djibouti-Addis Abeba railway begins" (p. xxxi) is evidently wrong. To avoid such an erroneous entry, all one needs is to simply look up the fact in such sources as R. PANKHURST's *Economic History of Ethiopia*. The construction of the first part of the Djibouti-Addis Abäba railway (which stretched as far as Derredawa) had been completed five years earlier than the given date. What the author probably intended to say is that the continuation of the construction further inland was taken up in 1907. An inaccuracy of a different category occurs on p. xxxiv where it is stated: "1935 ... 9 December, Ras Mulugheta invites Ethiopians to rebel against the Italians". What does "rebel" mean? The Italians had not yet occupied Ethiopia by the given date, and the Ethiopian Minister of Defence could not have possibly encouraged his people to "rebel"!

The author is apparently not familiar with Ethiopian culture of names and titles. "the Kassa brothers" (p. 194) is a European form of referring to brothers, but indeed alien to Ethiopian culture. Excepting the leader, the members of the Ethiopian diplomatic delegation to the United States are mentioned (cf. p. 3) with "Ato" attached to their names instead of Kantiba, Blatta, etc., titles which they had attained through merit. Unlike in the European culture, in which titles can alternate with Mr. or Mrs., titles are strictly applied in Ethiopia as long as they are not stripped off by law. In the chapter on Ethiopian aristocracy (pp. 123–61), there is a recurrent reference to the activities of "Ras Gugsä" during the Italian occupation.

There have been only two personalities in this century bearing the same name and title: a nephew of Empress Taytu who was killed in a battle in 1930, and a grandson of Emperor Yohannes IV who died of illness in 1932. SBACCHI was probably referring to the son of the latter, Däggazmač Haylä Šəllase, who had gone over to the Italians. If so, it is amazing that Ras Haylu, Ras Ayyälew and Ras Səyyum are referred to with their proper titles and names, and not with the names of their fathers. After all, one has to be consistent in what one does.

On p. xxii, it is stated that "... the price of the conquest of Ethiopia in terms of lives was high, and even higher for the Ethiopian people." This statement is rather cryptic, as the Ethiopian losses should actually be judged against defence of sovereignty and maintenance of liberty, and not against conquest of an Empire. The Ethiopians did not have an Empire to conquer in 1935–41, or did the author intend to compare the Italian losses to those of Ethiopia of the second half of the 19th century when it launched its scheme of building an Empire?

Another unqualified statement appears on p. xxiv: "... Mussolini, who was obsessed with the Amhara revolt, favored first putting down the Ethiopian resistance before embarking on the conquest of French Somaliland." What is the "Amhara revolt"? If this statement refers to the patriotic movement leaders and resistance fighters, it is totally wrong, for the Ethiopian fighters were ethnically and regionally fairly mixed in spite of the unfortunate fact that the published Ethiopian sources have focused on Šəwan resistance fighters.

The declaration of the Italian Empire is dated 9 May 1936, i.e. seven days after the departure of Emperor Haylä Šəllase and four days after the entry of the Italian army in Addis Ababa. This is generally accepted by historians despite the fact that the Italians had before them an expanse of territory yet to conquer. Occupation of the Imperial capital is assumed to be the demise of the vanquished government and the attainment of the ultimate political power of the conqueror. Apparently, this assumption applies exclusively to a European power. The author refuses by implication to accord the same right to the Ethiopian government when it was resurrected in 1941. In the same chronology, it is noted that Haylä Šəllase entered Addis Ababa on 5 May, but "the end of the Italian Empire" strangely comes seven months later with the fall of an Italian contingent in Gondar on 27 November.

The author's assessment of Emperor Haylä Šəllase's policy regarding education and the freeing of slaves (pp. 12 f.) is imbalanced. The economic factor was more important than the resistance of the nobility which was under his control anyway at least after 1930. The major problem with the freeing of slaves was what to do with them when separated from their masters. The government did not have enough money to settle them, and the relatively few that were freed

either returned to the protection of their original masters or offered themselves in the markets for sale. The Italians and the anti-slavery societies of the time scourged Ethiopia with their criticisms, but no foreign mission, society or government came up to offer a helping hand in this area. Again it was shortage of money than anything else which limited the size and number of schools in Ethiopia before and for ten or more years after the Italian invasion. The Italians, too, did not invest much more in educating Ethiopians. Hence, the author's statement that "Ironically, it was the contact with Fascist Italy, however harsh and cruel, that catapulted Ethiopia out of the Middle Ages" (p. 10) is a mere rhetoric, to say the least.

Bairu Tafla

A.V. CHRENKOV (ed.), *Rossiysko-efiopskiye otnosheniya v XIX – natschale XX vekoff* (Russisch-äthiopische Beziehungen im 19. und Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts) – Urkundensammlung, Moskau: Wostotschnaya Literatura, Russische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1998, 583 S., ohne Preisangabe.

In diesem Buch sind 229 Urkunden aus russischen Archiven veröffentlicht, die die Beziehungen zwischen Rußland und Äthiopien in der Zeit vom 18. Oktober 1750 bis 13. Januar 1917 betreffen (aus den Jahren 1750-1752 stammen allerdings nur 2 Hauptdokumente und 2 Anhänge; vom 30. Oktober 1861 bis Ende des 19. Jh. gibt es 128 Dokumente und vom Anfang des 20. Jh. bis 1917 noch 99 Dokumente).

Die meisten hier vorliegenden Urkunden stammen aus dem *Archiv der Außen-politik des russischen Imperiums*; inhaltlich handelt es sich dementsprechend um die Korrespondenz der Beamten des zaristischen Außenministeriums, oder – im Falle einiger offizieller Briefe der äthiopischen Kaiser – an den Zaren selbst. Einige Dokumente aus den alten russischen Finanz- und Wirtschaftsministerien, die aus dem *Russischen staatlichen Archiv für Geschichte* stammen, sind hier ebenfalls veröffentlicht.

Der Einleitungsartikel zu diesem Buch bietet auf 32 Seiten einen Überblick über die diplomatischen Aktivitäten der beiden Länder in der oben genannten Periode. Diese Einleitung hätte ausführlicher sein können, zumal die Urkunden ganz ohne Kommentar bleiben; der Text ist aber informativ und übersichtlich gegliedert. Bedauerlich ist, daß sein Inhalt nicht in einer z. B. englischen Kurzfassung auch westlichen Lesern zugänglich gemacht wurde.